



**September 3, 2015 Public Hearing Testimony before the
Connecticut General Assembly
Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees**

**LOW INCOME HOME ENERGY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (LIHEAP)
BLOCK GRANT ALLOCATION PLAN FFY 2015/2016**

Distinguished Chairpersons, Vice-Chairpersons, Ranking Members, and Members of the Appropriations, Human Services, and Energy & Technology Committees:

Thank you for holding this hearing on the proposed Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Block Grant Allocation Plan for FFY 2015/2016. My name is Deborah Monahan. I am the Executive Director of the Thames Valley Council for Community Action, Inc. (TVCCA) and the Vice Chair of the Connecticut Association for Community Action, Inc. (CAFCA). As you know, CAFCA is the state association for Connecticut's Community Action Agencies (CAAs), the state and federal designated anti-poverty agencies serving every one of Connecticut's 169 cities and towns.

Each year, the Connecticut Energy Assistance Program (CEAP) continues to help thousands of families in Connecticut pay their heating bills and avoid energy crises. On behalf of Connecticut's Community Action Network, I would like to thank you and Governor Malloy for continuing to strongly advocate for this critical program, and thank Commissioner Bremby for his ongoing support and that of his staff at the Department of Social Services.

As Connecticut's CAAs begin to prepare for what the winter months will bring, they are reminded of last year's winter season—one of the worst our state has faced in years, with data from the National Winter Service reporting February as the coldest month on record in Hartford. In 2015, our network reported that nearly 100,000 households avoided crises with energy assistance. Additionally, our agencies processed over 113,000 CEAP applications (FY 2014/2015 data is available on page 3). They know how home energy costs pose a devastating and onerous burden on low-income families—especially those in deep poverty—as they struggle to pay their heating bills. Nearly 80% of LIHEAP recipients that utilize heating assistance are below 100% of the poverty level, which is \$23,850 per year for a family of four¹. According to the Home Energy Affordability Gap: Connecticut (2014) Report, the number of low-income households in Connecticut has increased by 74,000, or 24%, since 2009. In addition, the state's poorest families owe an average of \$2,560 more in energy bills than they can afford to pay—an increase from last year. And, even when they are able to pay their bills, families often face adverse food, childcare, health, and housing consequences².

¹ Campaign for Home Energy Assistance, "Investing in LIHEAP: Why Energy Assistance is More Important Than Ever" (March 2014). Available at: http://liheap.org/cms/assets/uploads/2014/06/Investing_in_LIHEAP_2014.pdf

² Operation Fuel. "Home Energy Affordability In Connecticut: The Affordability Gap (2014)" December 2014.

LIHEAP doesn't just give those in need access to affordable home energy and keep them warm during the frigid winter months. This vital program also helps to safeguard and increase the health and safety of families, children, the elderly, and those with disabilities by targeting Connecticut's most vulnerable and Energy Insecure (EI) households. EI is defined as an inability to adequately meet basic household heating, cooling and energy needs. These energy deficiencies also threaten to diminish a family's ability to keep up with other costs associated with basic needs, forcing them to adjust their budget.³ This is especially true during the peak winter months, when energy bills can comprise roughly 30 percent of a low-income household's monthly income, particularly in substandard housing.⁴

In many cases, families find themselves sacrificing these needs in an effort to defend themselves against extreme temperatures and stay warm. In a 2011 National Energy Assistance Director's Association (NEADA) survey of households across the country receiving LIHEAP, respondents reported facing significant problems over a five-year period as a result of high energy costs: 24% went without food for at least one day; 37% went without medical or dental care; 31% did not make a full rent or mortgage payment; 33% used their kitchen stove or oven to provide heat; and, 19% had someone in the home become sick because the home was too cold.⁵ These tradeoffs pose a real challenge and threat for low-income families, especially those with children.

LIHEAP is a highly effective program, providing underserved families with the opportunity to address and offset the cost of these other necessary, basic, everyday needs. This essential support helps to ensure they never have to choose between heating their home and putting food on the table, or risking their lives to stay warm by using dangerous methods of heating their homes—resulting in a positive impact on their overall health and wellness. As one program recipient from Connecticut said, “I don't know what I would have done without it.”

With the brutal winter season Connecticut endured in 2014-2015 and a clear, demonstrated need for LIHEAP across the state, our agencies expect more eligible customers to come to their doors this upcoming year. Therefore, we would like to commend Commissioner Bremby and DSS for basing its CEAP allocation on level funding from FFY 2015, despite a 5% sequester budget cut. In addition to the state's support of the program, we remain grateful that Connecticut has decided to continue its policy of allocating additional assistance to low-income families so that they can remain eligible for food assistance. With that said, our network is pleased to be here to support the Department's CEAP 2015/2016 Allocation Plan for the LIHEAP Block Grant.

Thank you very much in advance for your time and consideration, and I am happy to take any questions you may have.

³ National Center for Children in Poverty. “Energy Insecurity Among Families with Children” (January 2014). Available at: http://www.nccp.org/publications/pdf/text_1086.pdf

⁴ Campaign for Home Energy Assistance, “Investing in LIHEAP: Why Energy Assistance is More Important Than Ever” (March 2014). Available at: http://liheap.org/cms/assets/uploads/2014/06/Investing_in_LIHEAP_2014.pdf

⁵ National Energy Assistance Director's Association (NEADA), “2011 National Energy Assistance Survey Summary Report” (October 2011). Available at: <http://neada.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/final-neada-2011-summary-report.pdf>

Chart 1: CEAP/CHAP Total Caseload Comparison

Agency	<u>2014/2015</u> <u>(6/23/2015)</u>	<u>2013/2014</u> <u>(Final)</u>
ABCD (Bridgeport)	10,850	11,465
ABCD (Norwalk/Stamford)	5,312	5,014
BCO (Bristol)	3,440	3,360
CAAWC (Danbury)	5,167	5,104
CRT (Hartford/Middletown)	28,301	29,584
TEAM (Derby)	4,269	4,434
HRA (New Britain)	4,525	4,286
CAANH (New Haven)	11,536	12,209
TVCCA (Norwich)	9,456	9,527
NOI (Waterbury/Meriden)	22,899	23,370
ACCESS (Willimantic)	7,809	8,217
Statewide Totals:	113,564	116,570

Data from DSS

Chart 2: CEAP/CHAP Eligible Caseload Comparison

Agency	<u>2014/2015</u> <u>(6/23/2015)</u>	<u>2013/2014</u> <u>(Final)</u>
ABCD (Bridgeport)	9,437	10,356
ABCD (Norwalk/Stamford)	4,819	4,410
BCO (Bristol)	2,837	2,846
CAAWC (Danbury)	4,451	4,420
CRT (Hartford/Middletown)	24,375	25,677
TEAM (Derby)	3,394	3,544
HRA (New Britain)	3,400	3,502
CAANH (New Haven)	9,827	10,579
TVCCA (Norwich)	8,366	8,359
NO (Waterbury/Meriden)	20,885	21,407
ACCESS (Willimantic)	7,297	7,581
Statewide Totals:	99,088	102,681

Data from DSS